

WASHINGTON, DC— U.S. Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) today announced the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) will undertake a study of Highway 126W from Eugene to Veneta to identify possible road improvements. ODOT will work with local communities and stakeholders, including the city councils of Veneta and Eugene and the Lane County Board of Commissioners, to develop solutions to the safety and mobility problems along this important Oregon corridor.

“Having driven Highway 126W countless times, I am intimately familiar with the congestion and safety problems hundreds of commuters and truckers face everyday. This study will identify the most problematic stretches of 126 between Eugene and Veneta so that ODOT, working with the local communities, can move forward to make the needed improvements in the future,” DeFazio said.

Also known as the Florence-Eugene Highway, Highway 126W is a 53-mile principal arterial and designated freight route on the National Highway System. A safe and efficient route between coastal Highway 101 and Interstate 5 is important for regional connectivity, and Highway 126W is a critical link from the coast inland to Lane County and Portland. Highway 126W is also essential for regional tourism, providing access to central coast recreation destinations.

The City of Veneta has faced obstacles attracting economic development due to safety and congestion concerns on this narrow, two-lane highway. ODOT data shows an average of 38 crashes per year on this section of Highway 126W between 1994 and 2006, including a total of 14 fatalities. Additionally, a recent corridor study concluded that the segment of the highway between Eugene and Veneta fails to meet mobility standards now, and by 2025 it is likely to become the most congested segment of the corridor if no transportation improvements occur.

In a May letter to the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC), DeFazio encouraged the OTC to undertake the study using unanticipated additional funding from the State’s Federal-aid highway formula funds for fiscal year 2010. The additional funds for Oregon are a direct result of DeFazio’s work on the last surface transportation authorization bill, called SAFETEA-LU.

DeFazio is Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Highways and Transit, which has jurisdiction over federal highway and transit programs.

